



## The Challenge

When the state of New York adopted Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy and Mathematics in 2011, Syracuse City School District (SCSD) sought to develop a long-term plan for Common Core implementation. The district viewed the shift to Common Core State Standards as a timely, strong platform for professional development—an opportunity with the potential to dramatically improve student achievement. SCSD knew that the success of educational change efforts hinges on a careful balance between supportive training and new practice demands.

As early ideas about Common Core implementation began to coalesce into a plan, the district envisioned an educator effectiveness system that would be based on thoughtful, constructive use of tools, and that would keep stakeholder voices top-of-mind. At the same time, the district was committed to crafting a reform plan that aligned support and evaluation systems to the demands of Common Core standards. A road map was needed to help the district focus their efforts on key strategies and practices that would increase instructional rigor and the complexity of unit and lesson content.

- Participating in the framework development process deepened educator practice knowledge and achieved stakeholder investment in the evaluation tool.
- Establishing observation rating norms and conducting periodic re-certification ensured principals consistently used commonly understood expectations.

Insight Education Group has  
*"demonstrated their ability  
to effectively understand  
and work with multiple  
stakeholders in the district  
including board members,  
district office leaders,  
union representatives,  
and teachers."*

Sharon L. Contreras,  
Superintendent of Schools,  
Syracuse City School District

## The Solution

In 2012, Syracuse City School District partnered with Insight Education Group to lead the development and implementation of custom-built instructional frameworks that support the college-ready teaching practices required by Common Core standards. SCSD and Insight drew up a plan that would enable the district to obtain meaningful feedback from instructional leaders and teachers, build confidence in the validity of the tools, and clearly mark a path to professional development that would support the new Common Core practices.





## The Solution (cont'd)

### Frameworks Aligned to Common Core

**Teachers.** Since the new instructional framework would be the foundation for the district's teacher development and evaluation system, a task force was charged with taking the comprehensive work forward. SCSD established a steering committee with broad representation. As a first step in the plan to produce a rigorous, research-based instructional framework, Insight Education Group guided the steering committee in a broad-based review of relevant research and existing instructional effectiveness documents.

In meetings facilitated by Insight, the task force analyzed frameworks that were in use across the nation and reviewed years of research literature from a multitude of relevant disciplines. Informed by this substantial grounding, the task force then closely analyzed the state's Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and constructed the Teaching and Learning Framework.

**Principals.** A similar process was used by SCSD and Insight to introduce the Building Leadership Framework and Rubric to all principals in the district. In concert with the two new frameworks, a third aligned rubric will be designed to serve as the foundation for the recruitment, training and evaluation of vice principals.

**Support Staff.** SCSD is building additional aligned frameworks to support the work of instructional coaches, library media specialists, and other positions across the district. Each framework developed is subject to a pilot test period and subsequent revision.

### Teacher Training and Principal Certification

To ensure that teachers are evaluated equitably using the revised frameworks and evaluation systems, Insight Education Group developed a certification process for principals, which was implemented prior to conducting high stakes evaluations.

Insight also facilitates monthly norming sessions in which video case studies and live co-observations are employed. These recalibration sessions are designed to ensure that principals continue to interpret observed instructional practices according to the Teaching and Learning Framework. All teacher observers attend facilitated norming sessions to increase their inter-rater reliability scores—a measure of the fidelity of their use of the observation protocol and tools. School leaders also receive training on how to coach and develop both high and low performing teachers.

Additionally, and in accordance with the district's original vision, Insight Education Group provides professional development for teachers that is designed to clarify and model the instructional practices described in the Teaching and Learning Framework.



*"Insight's understanding of multiple perspectives as well as their experience in district and school leadership, classroom instruction, and professional development have positively contributed to our district."*

Superintendent  
Sharon L. Contreras

## The Results

The SCSD Teaching and Learning Framework is being used as the evaluation system for all K-5 teachers in a district-wide pilot. Across the district, Insight Education Group is working closely with all K-5 administrators to build knowledge and capacity for observing, coaching, and rating teachers, and for effective implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Insight is currently working with SCSD and the American Institutes of Research (AIR) to conduct an independent evaluation of the implementation of the Syracuse City School District Teaching and Learning Framework. Information and data from that study are forthcoming.

- 35 meetings were facilitated with stakeholders to develop the evaluation tool
- 75 teacher observers were trained and certified on the framework and rubric
- Aligned professional development was provided to K-5 teachers and evaluators
- State DOE approval was secured for both frameworks and rubrics